

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK,EEC

SUBJECT: WILSON LOSING HIS GRIP ON LABOR PARTY'S

MANAGEMENT OF EC ISSUE

SUMMARY. THE ANTI-MARKETEERS HAVE DEMONSTRATED UNEXPECTED STRENGTH AMONG LABOR MPS, AND ARE THREATENING TO COMMIT THE LABOR PARTY ITSELF TO CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S RECOMMENDATION. WILSON'S RELUCTANCE TO IMPOSE NORMAL DISCIPLINE ON HIS CABINET HAS GIVEN THE ANTI-MARKETEERS AN OPENING THEY ARE SKILLFULLY EXPLOITING. THE DEVELOPING SPLIT HAS POTENTIALLY GRAVE CONSEQUENCES

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FOR WILSON'S OWN POSITION AS LEADER. END SUMMARY.

1. ANTI-MARKEETERS IN THE LABOR PARTY HAVE QUICKLY AND ADROITLY MOVED TO WREST FROM PRIME MINISTER WILSON THE INITIATIVE ON THE EC MEMBERSHIP ISSUE. IMMEDIATELY IN THE WAKE OF WILSON'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HIS CABINET HAD ENDORSED THE RENEGOTIATED TERMS AND WOULD RECOMMEND TO THE BRITISH ELECTORATE A FAVORABLE VOTE IN THE REFERENDUM, FIVE OF THE SEVEN DISSENTING CABINET MEMBERS OUTDOWN AN EARLY DRAFT MOTION OPPOSING THE GOVERNMENT'S RECOMMENDATION. THE MOTION HAS ALREADY ATTRACTED ABOUT 140 SIGNATURES INCLUDING THOSE OF TWO DOZEN MINISTERS AND WHIPS, AND THE TOTAL IS CLIMBING TOWARDS A MAJORITY (159) OF THE LABOR PARTY'S ENTIRE PARLIAMENTARY CONTINGENT.

2. EMBOLDENED BY THIS EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT 18 OF THE 29 MEMBERS OF THE PARTY'S NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (NEC) GAVE NOTICE YESTERDAY (MARCH 20) THAT THEY WOULD SPONSOR AN NEC MOTION RECOMMENDING TO THE FORTHCOMING SPECIAL PARTY CONFERENCE THAT THE PARTY SHOULD CAMPAIGN FOR UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EC. THE MOTION, WHICH WAS SIGNED BY THREE CABINET MINISTERS (BENN, FOOT AND CASTLE), AND TWO JUNIOR MINISTERS (JUDITH HART AND JOAN LESTER) WILL BE CONSIDERED BY THE NEC AT ITS NEXT MONTHLY MEETING ON MARCH 26.

3. COMMENT: THE ANTI-MARKEETERS' ASTONISHING DEMONSTRATION OF STRENGTH AND THEIR APPARENT READINESS TO STAND UP TO THE GOVERNMENT IN EARNEST ARE PROVING AN EMBARRASSMENT TO WILSON'S POSITION AS LEADER OF THE LABOR PARTY. IT WAS WIDELY ASSUMED BY PRO-MARKEETERS, AND PRESUMABLY BY WILSON HIMSELF, THAT ONCE THE CABINET HAD PRONOUNCED IN FAVOR OF STAYING IN THE EC, THE MIDDLE GROUP OF UNCOMMITTED LABOR MPS WOULD LINE UP BEHIND THE GOVERNMENT, AND THAT THE FINAL DIVISION IN THE PLP WOULD BE ROUGHLY FIVE TO THREE IN FAVOR OF STAYING IN THE EC. THIS CALCULATION SERIOUSLY UNDERESTIMATED THE PULL OF ANTI-MARKET SENTIMENT WITHIN THE PARTY. GIVEN LICENSE BY THE PM TO DISAGREE, MANY MPS HAVE FOUND IT POLITIC TO CAST THEIR LOT WITH THE ANTI-MARKEETERS. WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT CALLAGHAN AND OTHERS ARE NOW DESPERATELY

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STRIVING TO HALT THE 495, BUT MUCH OF THE DAMAGE HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE.

4. THE EMBARRASSMENT CAUSED BY HAVING HALF THE PLP ON RECORD AS OPPOSED TO A CABINET RECOMMENDATION IS SMALL COMPARED TO THE PROSPECT, POSED BY THE NEC MOTION, OF THE LABOR PARTY MACHINERY IN THE COUNTRY AT LARGE BEING MOBILIZED TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE RECOMMENDATION OF A

LABOR GOVERNMENT. WHILE IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ACCEPTED THAT THE SPECIAL CONFERENCE, DOMINATED BY THE TRADE UNIONS, WOULD GO ON RECORD AS OPPOSING EC MEMBERSHIP, IT WAS EXPECTED THAT THE PARTY AS A PARTY WOULD REMAIN NEUTRAL IN THE REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN. WILSON WILL NOW HAVE TO FIGHT HARD TO GAIN EVEN THAT. IT IS ALL WELL AND GOOD FOR HIM TO ASSERT THAT HE WILL NOT REGARD A NEGATIVE REFERENDUM OUTCOME AS CAUSE FOR RESIGNATION, BUT IF HE IS REPUDIATED BY HIS OWN PARTY AND THEN NOT VINDICATED BY THE ELECTORATE, THERE IS A REAL QUESTION HOW MUCH AUTHORITY HE WOULD CONTINUE TO HAVE AS PRIME MINISTER.

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